The North Bronx was hit with two devastating blows: COVID-19 and unemployment. The Bronx experienced the highest per capita cases of COVID in the world. Many were ill and the daily reports of persons passing away seemed relentless. The subsequent stay-at-home orders further compounded the challenges for many families as businesses were shuttered, leaving bread winners suddenly unemployed. With no job and the inability to purchase food, what were they to do?

It was during this critical period that Joseph’s Storehouse opened. Melbourne Gregory, North Bronx church elder, singlehandedly had scoured the city in his vehicle, for the two previous years, collecting bread and fresh produce donations for the church. Community Ministries and Hospitality Ministries had been providing Sunday meals to the homeless and soup to the homebound. But new health guidelines restricted these operations. As the COVID crisis intensified, Gregory knew what must be done. The church board decided to use funds collected at Communion to support a food pantry. Keith Williams, North Bronx church elder and trained chef, not only purchased beans, rice, and other staples from a wholesale distributor, but also balanced the offering for maximum nutritional benefit.

When the doors first opened, the church served about 50 families. Now Joseph’s Storehouse provides 450 families each week with a bag of groceries. The North Bronx church is not part of the food pantry network, but the ministry has been able to survive through donations of excess from other pantries and cash.

The North Bronx church bus can be seen all over the city as the elders collect donations to meet the demand. Oftentimes, Gregory will be out all night to secure needed donations. Every time the pantry runs out of money or supplies, miraculously more comes in.

As the need grows, the Lord opens windows and pours out so many blessings that there is not enough room to receive it. But it has not come without sacrifice. According to Gregory, “Each week the lines are getting longer, along with many new faces.” With the combined efforts of the pastors and elders Keith Williams and Benjamin Powell, it takes two or three full days to pick up, pack, and distribute the food. “Sometimes the tiredness is evident, however, we can’t stop. Just as God set Joseph to feed His people in time of famine, I believe that God has set us here for such a time as this,” said Dedrick Blue, the church’s senior pastor. Joseph’s Storehouse has quickly become one of the largest providers of food to the community and some recipients now affectionately refer to Elder Gregory as “Joseph.”

—Dahlia Reid, communication director, North Bronx church